

The barriers and bridges to Year 11 and 12 education participation

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Transition, retention and attainment are related but differ in fundamental ways and therefore require different strategies to enhance and consideration of the different variables that impact on each. The common denominator of successful transition from Year 10 to Year 11, staying in school in Years 11 and 12 and attainment of Year 12 is meaningful and purposeful school participation. Successful transition is a predecessor to retention and attainment. Students who have a seamless transition from Year 10 to Year 11 and success in choosing a study program that is meaningful to them have a higher chance of retention and successful completion of Year 12. Successful retention for many students requires successful transition. Retention requires different strategies in Years 11 and 12 to ensure young people continue to be engaged and participate in what society and human capital needs dictate be more specialised study options. Specialisation is an important education attainment condition because it allows students to engage in courses and subjects that are personally more meaningful and purposeful to them; choice therefore aligned to the motivation to remain in education. Retention has a close association with a sense of community, acceptance and psychological comfort with the educational environment. Retention therefore relies not only the psychological motivation provided through meaningful and purposeful study options but also schools providing students a sense of community and of psychological comfort in the space and in the relationship they have with teachers and other students.

The Tasmanian community have been slow to accept and embed within cultural understanding the importance and value of Year 11 and 12 education participation. Yet the literature indicates full participation in education through to Year 12 builds personal capital for future employment, builds social cohesion through participation and builds human capital. All these contribute to personal and community economic and social advancement. As the Tasmanian community understands this better, an important shift in cultural understanding is beginning to occur in Tasmanian communities. Preliminary transition statistics shows a higher than national average number of Tasmanian young people know the benefits of completing Years 11 and 12 and are transitioning successfully to a specialist Year 11 and 12 campuses.

Social inclusion strategies are built on positive understandings around place and belonging. These strategies find a foundation more easily in communities that share a geographical location. Social inclusion for school communities are supported by the provision of Year 11 and 12 linked to a geographic community not necessarily a particular school community. Regardless of students' academic level or social circumstance, in principle, a community provides all young people the same opportunity to engage in a range of educational experiences. In rural Tasmania this equates to Year 11 and 12 education offerings delivered at or near to an accessible 7-10 school. In urban Tasmania at the present time this equates to Year 11 and 12 being delivered locally, at Year 11 and 12 campuses near a group of 7-10 schools. The practicality of this model simply makes sense in urban Tasmania but needs modelling. Where Year 7-10 schools are geographically clustered there should be cluster dedicated Year 11 and 12 campus, part of the 7-10 school group and accessible to it. Duplication of Years 11 and 12 in an urban setting is simply not human resource effective unless governments long term cost efficiency intention is to make all urban school 7-12 and then close low enrolment secondary schools.

Consistency with social cohesion strategies require that government Year 11 and 12 education models are socially inclusive. Any secondary school model chosen by the Tasmanian government must therefore be determined to be socially cohesive not socially divisive. The Tasmanian government's secondary school model needs to demonstrate inclusion and support and resource strategies that are socially inclusive. Divisive policy may create barriers to participation where anxious students are unintentionally being self-excluded, less academic students are separated from their peers and ambivalent students are offered the line of least resistance and encouraged to stay with teachers they know in an environment they know and feel safe in, to avoid transition to a Year 11 and 12 campus. The critical mass of inclusion creates the opportunity for better educational outcome. Inclusive education models promote and support transition by resourcing, embedding and acculturating every student to transition with peers from their Year 7-10 campus to a nearby known and connected Year 11 and 12 campus .

All adolescent young people need to be given the opportunity to develop their individual capacities and strengths. Adolescence is a developmental time when young people are particularly receptive to being engaged and supported in the process of exploration and construction of identity (Cote & Schwartz, 2002; Meeus, 1996). A culture of inclusion in Year 11 and 12 not only enriches identity development through exposure to diversity this exposure also supports the development of a cohesive society. The adolescent's learning community needs to reflect the broader community and include young people from all walks of life. Year 11 and 12 are pivotal in providing young people new opportunities to develop and consolidate their identity strengths, to build social cohesion through understanding of difference and for young people to experience an environment of educational transition to more specialised efforts and a step towards the independence offered by future work or study be that a traineeship, apprenticeship or further study at TAFE or University. Inclusive participatory and specialised pathway focussed education is an investment in human capital.

Year 9 and 10 preparation activities including orientation visits to Year 11 and 12 college campuses are critical in enabling students to investigate their options, make informed participation decisions and gain the experiential confidence needed to engage with a new and different learning environment and to begin to develop positive and open relationships with new teachers and other young people.

Young people complex their identities through the broadening of experience and it is experience that enables young people to engage with education and by doing so build their educational capital and attain educational outcomes meaningful to them. Complexing of identity is an important adolescent developmental task. Extending the variety and type of educational strategies and methodologies young people are provided, particularly in Year 10 educators can conduit further educational engagement and participation post Year 10. More practical learners, those who are ambivalent about academic study, socially or economically vulnerable or simply anxious can be given specific experiences in vocational or applied learning, such as the Certificate I in Community Services offered as part of the research investigation undertaken by the author. These types of taster experiences and foundational qualifications allow ambivalent students to see new reasons to engage in Year 11 and 12. Information about both VET courses and TQA subjects need to be provided on several occasions throughout the year to all Year 10 students.

Like many other Australian young people many Tasmanian government school students come from families and communities experiencing social and economic disadvantage. These students in particular face significant personal and environmental barriers to successful educational participation. The conditions and characteristics of disadvantage, adverse life events and the everyday experience of living in a collectively stressed community creates many barriers to

participation in senior secondary education. Barriers such as a heightened state of fight/flight functioning (distracts and disrupts capacity to concentrate), limited daily access to basic funds required for lunch and transport to school, limited first-hand knowledge of and experience of what exists outside their community (fear of the unknown), and limited opportunity to develop the sense of confidence to try out something and make mistakes before success; a type of confidence that comes from positive and successful childhood experiences. A less number of positive and safe social and educational participation experiences cultivate fear of the unknown, fear of difference and fear of failure. Tasmania's urban secondary schools have a high number of students from stressed communities. Disadvantaged students and schools located in disadvantaged communities need additional resources to provide experiences, counteract poor social capital and enhance education participation. The learning and confidence that comes from positive and safe learning experiences that extend the curriculum out into the broader community cannot be under stated. If schools provide safe and purposeful curriculum and enrichment activities inside and outside the classroom for disadvantaged young people these experiences work to counteract the individual, economic and social circumstances that impeded the educational development of young people from stressed communities. Schools can create experiences for students to draw upon that enable young people to safely try something new and be successful. Some young people from disadvantage and stressed communities will unconsciously sabotage their own and others efforts because failure is familiar.

Without the resourcing of and strengthening of enrichment and transition experiences provided by committed teachers vulnerable and disadvantaged young people do not have a chance against the odds. At present it is committed teachers, with limited resources that hold together a fragile situation for disadvantaged young people. Resources are needed to develop sister and brother schools and community programs, provide cultural, social and sporting trips, community activities, event participation, field visits, taster experiences, industry visits and senior secondary school orientation visits. These types of curriculum connected enrichment activities and programs provide young people safe opportunities to gain confidence through experience. These experiences provided in lower secondary school Years 7 to 10 can ease transition to Years 11 and 12 and support the broader curriculum.

Cost most not prohibit participation in senior secondary education. No cost public transport to senior secondary full time students would remove that particular financial and practical barrier to participation. Many students are thinking about part-time work and part-time study. These students need an incentive to attend school full time and limit work to outside school hours; part-time study makes the attainment of a TCE difficult, if not impossible. Many students would look more favourably on full time study in Year 11 and 12 if some courses offered were school based apprenticeships, linked to industry and pathways to work or to TAFE training at higher levels of the AQF. Vocational pathways often are more meaningful to those students who are more hands on, or work focussed because these courses are purposeful in assisting them in gaining entry into work or securing them on a pathway to work. Vocational taster days and orientation visits, along with preparation support for entry into the vocational courses offered in Years 11 and 12 provide vulnerable students and those who have had difficulty demonstrating achievement in a high school learning environment with an edge that helps counter balance disadvantage.

References

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